

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

SEX

Kinsey, A. C., Pomeroy, W. B., Martin, C. E. and Gebhard, P. H. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female.* Philadelphia and London, 1953. W. B. Saunders. Pp. xxx + 842. Price 50s.

"Fishing is one of man's oldest occupations and fish stories entered folklore very early. Poets and nature fakers added their touches to marine superstitions that persist to our day. The popular Press still cannot resist unsubstantiated stories of sea monsters."

"A naked man swimming in the sea mingles with and observes life around him and may be watched by other swimmers and the recording eye of the lens. His advent means the end of superstition."

From *The Silent World*, by Jacques-Yves Cousteau.

CAPTAIN COUSTEAU discarded the old type of diving suit and greatly daring, swam with his aqualung into the unknown. Unless we all, reviewers and readers alike, can make similar great efforts to escape from traditional thoughts and emotions, this book, *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female*, is not for us. However "cool attention, courageous judgement and scientific equanimity" can aid us, suggests the Medical Director for the Rockefeller Foundation in his introduction to the first volume of this series.

For this and the previous book on the male are progress reports on a continuing project. There are 16,000 case histories now and this is a report on 5,940 histories of white females taken before 1950. Following the pattern of the first volume, the analyses of these histories form the major part of the work. The first sections of both books discuss critically the way the information was collected and the value and limitations of the evidence. Invaluable to all students of social science, many general readers will enjoy "the human drama that has been involved in securing the data."

The last and perhaps the most important third of this report attempts to discover some

of the fundamental factors which underlie the similarities and differences between the sexes. To do this, the anatomy, physiology, neural and hormonal bases and psychological factors involved in sexual response in the male and female are exhaustively examined.

Statistics often tend to obliterate the individual human being and elevate the normal or the average. The uniqueness of each individual's experience is regarded by the authors as "the most important fact which we can report on the sexual histories of the females" in this study.

Some idea of the massive quality of the work is gained when one realises each interview involved about 300 questions and lasted nearly two hours. Despite this, 319 histories have been retaken usually after two years, and the information from 706 pairs of spouses compared for thirty-three items, in order to check the accuracy of the record.

It has been frequently stated that since histories were only taken from volunteers, the sample could not be representative. Of the histories for this volume, 15 per cent come from groups where 100 per cent of the members have given their histories. From a comparison of reviews and the authors' own discussions of methodology, the latter appear to be as severe upon themselves as their critics.

Judging from the reception of the first volume on the male, many people, put off by the Press hullabaloo, will not trouble to read this book. They will miss a great deal for it is difficult in a review to show the balance, the restraint, the subtlety and the humanity which make this a great book. The writers do "not believe that sexual factors are the elements which most determine the fate of a marriage" for "there seems to be no single factor which is more important for the maintenance of a marriage than the determination, the will that that marriage shall be maintained." However their data leads them to believe that two-thirds of all the marriages had at one time or another serious disagreement about

sexual matters, due often to a lack of understanding of the basic differences between male and female.

One of the most profound of these differences is that "the range of variation in the female far exceeds the range of variation in the male." There is every gradation between the 2 per cent. who had never been roused sexually to the few who were aroused many times per day for long periods of years. Because of this wide difference in behaviour and also because young girls and older women discuss sex much less freely than boys or men, women may find it more difficult to be tolerant of all the varied types of sexual response that exist.

Summaries of the data on childhood and adolescent sexuality and the conclusions on masturbation and pre-marital coitus would be misleading because almost all the statements are carefully qualified. As their understanding of these matters has deepened, the authors have developed the view that it is not the individual elements of a response that identify it as sexual. Many of the items of sexual response are found in reactions of anger, fear and pain. The sexual syndrome is a unique combination of these physiological elements "but there is no other sort of behavioral response which involves all of the elements which may be found in sexual response." This leads to some interesting speculations about the relationships between anger and rage and sexual activities.

Returning to the statistical data, in an important number of marriages, during the early years, the husbands are more desirous of sexual contact than the wives, but in later years the position may be reversed. Many women maintain their interest in sexual relations until their fifties or even sixties. The sexual pattern of a marriage is usually determined by the husband's desires.

There is one gap in this record that seems inexplicable. There are negligible references to pregnancy or fear of pregnancy and their effects on the female sexual responses. Were the interviews conducted on a male pattern? Or did a special section for women on childbearing reveal nothing of signifi-

cance? To get a balanced view, we need to know the answers to these questions.

Dr. Kinsey's name is convenient shorthand for a large group centred round the Institute for Sex Research at Indiana University. Pomeroy, Martin and Gebhard shared the interviewing with Kinsey for this volume, which has five consulting editors, two statistical and one each for psychiatry, neurophysiology and marriage counselling. These in turn are representatives of the formidable array of specialists in a large number of fields who have contributed data and advice for this study. Specialist critics in effect criticise a number of their fellow workers in the United States while this lay review seems almost an impertinence.

However, this volume more than its predecessor was published explicitly for the lay reader's use. This brings us to one of the central themes of the Kinsey controversy. Should such knowledge be freely available to all? The reviewer in the *Lancet* has no doubts about the value of this: "quite disproportionate harm and unhappiness is often caused by inadequate sex relations. The expulsion of the legendary and the anecdotal can be very simply achieved by providing an occasion for comparing notes, and this is an important undertaking in itself." The *British Medical Journal* reviewer seems ambivalent. On the one hand "this report will inevitably serve as a reference book for all concerned with human relations and will be quoted throughout the world for many years to come", but on the other, "the dissemination of a little knowledge and the advertisement of evil can create and aggravate a problem."

Few would deny the right of scientists to investigate normal sexual behaviour but some clearly feel the knowledge thus gained should only be available to the public through the professions. But who, as things are, is an expert in normal ordinary sexual behaviour? One doctor expert is prepared, in *Man and Woman*, to give a judgment based only on the preview notices. The well-known reviewer in the *Observer* in discussing the much debated problem of vaginal orgasm, writes "we find the strangest anomaly in the

denial of the internal one—a denial likely to confuse both lay and professional readers.” We lay readers cannot guess from that sentence that this book includes a new gynæcological study on 879 women to determine the sensitivity of the vagina to tactile stimulation, or that it is a central theme of the whole work that it is the total response of the whole body that must be considered more than those of specific areas.

Sex being so emotionally charged for all of us, we have to choose between the problems of expert but secondhand opinions and the considerable difficulties of trying to keep our balance while reading a great deal of material, some of which may be simultaneously disturbing and irrelevant.

What relevance have these two volumes for us in Britain? Because they are scientific works, the information given is very specific. This volume tells us about white non-prison females in the United States, but because so far the sample is inadequate for the lower educational and rural groups, no generalisations are made for the whole white population of the United States. The percentages for the different types of sexual activity are of interest only for students of the American scene. The last five chapters dealing with such basic factors as hormonal differences are likely to become part of standard textbooks on normal sex.

There is a great deal of material that is outside either of these categories. To give two examples, Kinsey has shown that true religious belief greatly modifies an individual's sexual behaviour. Can we assume without further work, this is true in England also? It appears in America, that “in many instances the law, in the course of punishing the offender, does more damage to more persons than was ever done by the individual in his illicit sexual activity.” Are our laws here equally out of touch with reality? Expert articles on such subjects would be of great value, as would others that extracted the facts of universal importance from those of merely transitory or local value.

The debate will continue on the moral, social, scientific and legal aspects of this

whole project. It is to be hoped the discussion will stimulate the scientific study of normal sexual behaviour here in Britain.

RACHEL CONRAD.

MARRIAGE

Mace, David R. *Whom God Hath Joined: A Book of Christian Marriage.* London, 1953. Epworth. Pp. 92. Price 6s.

A carefully written and simplified approach to the subject of marriage, based upon the Christian ethic. Short, pithy, convincing—the five chapters dealing with the purpose, intimacies, fellowship and wider implications of marriage reveal the great and practical experience of the author in this field of human thought and behaviour.

The Christian attitude to sex and marriage is today, as Dr. Mace truly observes, less negative in some of its interpretations than it formerly was, and it is these less negative interpretations which receive special emphasis.

Reverence is more widely embracing than any dogma, and of all human conventions marriage deserves very special consideration in this regard because of its undoubted biological and moral value. If this is admitted, its significance in the eugenic field becomes apparent.

HORDER.

GENETICS

Harris, H. *An Introduction to Human Biochemical Genetics.* London, 1953. Cambridge University Press (for the Galton Laboratory). Pp. iv+96. Price 15s.

ENOUGH information has accumulated on the inheritance of biochemical abnormalities to justify a monograph on “inborn errors of metabolism.” The aim is to bring up to date the book published under this name by A. E. Garrod who by his study of alkaptonuria made himself the founder of biochemical genetics. It is fitting that the monograph has